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COMMUNITY & GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

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Kingsport Chief Service Officer issues volunteer challenge to professional retirees

KINGSPORT – After several months of research and preparation, Chief Service Officer Clarence “Bunky” Seay issued a challenge at the Kingsport Kiwanis meeting Friday for recent professional retirees to step up to the plate to help Kingsport bolster its economic recruiting efforts.

Introduced by Mayor Dennis Phillips, who appointed Seay to the position of Chief Service Office in September, Seay presented the community with a 19-page report outlining strategies and impact metrics that will guide and gauge the upcoming volunteer effort.

“Over the past five years, three of Kingsport’s largest employers, Eastman Chemical Company, American Glass Company, and Domtar Paper Mill have seen over 1,300 individuals retire,” Seay noted from the report. “Available data suggests that more than 200 highly-educated recent retirees from the past few years are residing in the area. By linking qualified volunteers with interested companies, it is anticipated that Kingsport will have a competitive advantage in recruiting new businesses or assisting in the expansion of existing businesses.”

Seay, a retired engineer from Eastman Chemical Company, noted that the basis of such volunteer service will be short term, with a major potential impact.

“We are primarily interested at this time in retired engineers and business executives who would like to be involved. It would require a minimum amount of time and be on an ‘as needed’ basis. As a situation develops with a potential new or existing business, you would be contacted and invited to participate in meetings with our economic development staff and or discussions with the prospective company.”

Seay noted that Kingsport’s Higher Education Initiative, which has resulted in a number of industry-specific programs being offered in the Academic Village in downtown Kingsport, positions the City positively, assuring potential employers of a competent, educated workforce.

“Our economic development staff work successfully with a broad array of industries but do not always have detailed knowledge about a specific product or processes, as well as manufacturing suppliers and customers who would be logical recruiting opportunities for Kingsport,” Seay said. “This is where the volunteer comes into play. The purpose will be to use their personal knowledge, friendships, contacts and business knowledge to promote Kingsport as a location for the particular business.”

The volunteer approach is designed to dovetail with Gov. Bill Haslam's new Jobs4TN economic development strategy, focusing on six key business clusters where Tennessee has unique competitive advantages, while also streamlining and strengthening the recruitment process and leveraging the ability of existing industries to lead the state in job creation.

The Chief Service Officer is a volunteer position, and a part of the Cities of Service program. In Kingsport, the effort is also supported by AARP.

Anyone with an interest in helping the project should drop an email to Seay at BunkySeay@kingsporttn.gov or call the city's main phone number at 229-9400 and ask for Scalf or Baker.

ABOUT CITIES OF SERVICE

Founded in New York City on Sept. 10, 2009 by 17 mayors from cities around the nation, Cities of Service is a bipartisan coalition of mayors committed to working together to engage citizens in a multi-year effort to address pressing city needs through impact volunteerism. The coalition includes more than 100 mayors, representing nearly 50 million Americans. Cities of Service supports mayors to leverage citizen service strategies, addressing local needs and making government more effective. All Cities of Service efforts are characterized by a concept called "impact volunteering" -- volunteer strategies that target community needs, use best practices, and set clear outcomes and measures to gauge progress. The coalition builds on the work of New York City Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, who created the nation's first service plan in April 2009 and appointed the nation's first municipal Chief Service Officer.

ABOUT AARP

AARP was founded on the principal of service. Since its establishment in 1958, AARP has been dedicated to delivering value to its members through service. Now, with the heightened interest in civic engagement and a new vitality around service, including the passage of the Kennedy Serve America Act in 2009, AARP is well-positioned to tap into the strength of its millions of members to help solve pressing problems at the community level through the Cities of Service -- AARP Volunteer Chief Service Officer Initiative.

ABOUT CITIES OF SERVICE -- AARP VOLUNTEER CHIEF SERVICE OFFICER INITIATIVE

Through collaboration between Cities of Service and AARP, the Cities of Service coalition will expand to cities with less than 125,000 residents by providing an opportunity to appoint a highly-skilled volunteer to serve as Chief Service Officer for one year, many of whom come from AARP's membership. Chief Service Officers are senior members of the mayoral leadership team and are responsible for the development and implementation of a high-impact service plan that leverages citizen service to address the city's most important challenges. In addition to appointing a volunteer Chief Service Officer, participating cities receive a \$5,000 Recognition Award from AARP and technical assistance from Cities of Service to develop and implement their high-impact service plans.